FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
HIDDEN VALLEY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT,
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

Hidden Valley is the site of a former alpine ski resort in Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). The ski area closed in the spring of 1992, and restoration efforts began in 1999. Restoration projects were designed to restore Hidden Valley to pre-European contact condition, leaving no formal access for visitors seeking recreational opportunities.

RMNP recognized an opportunity to meet its mission to "preserve natural conditions and scenic beauties, and to provide the freest recreational use" (NPS 1982:8), by providing recreational opportunities that would complement on-going restoration efforts at Hidden Valley.

The Hidden Valley Improvement Project Environmental Assessment was available for public review and comment for thirty (30) days. RMNP received ten responses in the form of letters and e-mail documents. Of the ten (10) respondents, five were in favor of Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative). Three of the ten supported the Preferred Alternative with additional suggestions. Two of the ten respondents proposed changes/suggestions to the Preferred Alternative in their comments. All of the alternatives and all of the comments were carefully considered during the preparation of this Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

After a careful review of public comments, anticipated resource and visitor impacts to RMNP, the preferred alternative (Alternative 2) has been selected for implementation, with the following provisions:

1. Best management practices would be implemented to minimize soil loss during and after construction. Mitigation measures to protect and preserve soil resources in the project area would be incorporated in the landscaping/revegetation and construction stipulations. General erosion control measures would include minimizing the area of disturbance to defined construction limits, and limiting the time soil is exposed. Upon removal of asphalt and concrete, it would be determined if any topsoil is present. If topsoil is present, excavation would be allowed after the removal of topsoil. Topsoil salvage methods would include windrowing topsoil at the limits of construction and placing the soil back on the finished areas during reclamation. Selective topsoil redistribution to soil deficient areas would be used as needed, but topsoil would not be stockpiled for a long period of time. Soil amendments, mulches, and seeding would be selectively applied to match site conditions and revegetation goals. Long-term soil protection would come from prompt revegetation of disturbed areas following construction and control of invasive exotic plants. Areas disturbed during construction would be restored with topsoil, and planted with native vegetation as appropriate.

2. Best management practices would be used during and after construction to minimize erosion that could result in siltation and turbidity in Hidden Valley Creek, and prevent sediment-laden, and potentially contaminated runoff water from entering Hidden Valley Creek. The park would prepare a detailed landscape/revegetation plan that would provide long-term erosion control and stabilization of disturbed areas. Typical erosion control Best Management Practices that would be used for this project include:

- Filter barriers (silt fences, coir logs, tree trunks)
- Sediment retention structures (temporary and permanent sediment traps, sediment basins, check dams)
- Revegetation of disturbed areas
- Monitoring of water quality in Hidden Valley Creek
- Temporary berms and curbs to control runoff from the parking lot surface and graded areas
- Erosion control blankets and mulch
- A stormwater management plan would be prepared for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
- On-going evaluation of the best use of traction sand and deicing products for winter road safety would seek to minimize the introduction of sands and deicing material into aquatic environments

The landscape/revegetation plan would be directly coordinated with on-going restoration efforts at Hidden Valley under project numbers 99-02 and 00-07.

3. The NPS would follow *Rocky Mountain National Park Best Management Practices for Vegetation Restoration* (RMNP 2001) and implement a detailed landscaping/revegetation plan to restore native vegetation to areas disturbed during construction. Mitigation to reduce impacts on vegetation resources and ensure revegetation of disturbed areas would include several measures. Principal mitigation components would include:
    - Implementation of Best Management Practices to prevent wind and water erosion
    - Salvage of topsoil and existing seed sources
    - Implementation of landscaping design features, such as slope rounding, to minimize visual impacts and to aid in creating suitable site conditions for revegetation
    - Application of topsoil and native seed and plantings according to site-specific conditions and vegetation communities
    - Application of soil amendments, mulches, matting, organic matter, and other measures to facilitate revegetation
    - Revegetation seeding and planting would use native species from genetic stocks originating in the park; plant species density, abundance, and diversity would be restored as near as possible to predicted conditions present in the late 1800s

    Additional measures to prevent the introduction and spread of noxious weeds during construction include:
    - implementation of a weed management plan in accordance with the park's Invasive Exotic Plant Management Plan (expected to be completed in 2003) to prevent weed infestation and spread
    - avoiding use of topsoil currently supporting exotic plants
    - cleaning and inspecting construction vehicles prior to entering the park to prevent the import of weeds from tires and mud on the vehicles
    - limiting the use of fertilizers that may favor weeds over native species
    - using periodic inspections and spot controls to prevent weed establishment; if weeds invade an area, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques will be used to selectively combine management techniques to control the particular weed species

4. The proposed project has been designed to avoid long-term impacts to wetland areas scheduled for restoration under project 00-07. Restoration of Hidden Valley Creek and associated wetlands near the old ski area parking lot would be implemented in coordination with the proposed project. When restoration and construction are complete, the proposed parking lot and other facilities would not impact wetlands gained and restored through project 00-07.

   Additional mitigation measures to avoid and minimize direct and indirect impacts to wetlands would include:
   - Placement of silt fence or other barriers adjacent to wetlands and streams to avoid direct impacts from construction equipment
   - Use of best management practices for erosion and sediment control to prevent the introduction of sediments into wetlands areas
   - A stormwater management plan would be prepared for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
   - On-going evaluation of the best use of traction sand and deicing products for winter road safety would seek to minimize the introduction of sands and deicing material into aquatic environments

5. Mitigation and conservation measures would be incorporated into the Preferred Alternative to minimize potential impacts on wildlife. These measures would be implemented during the final project design. Mitigation measures applicable to minimizing wildlife habitat impacts are described below:
   - vegetation removal and disturbance within the construction zone would be minimized, and all temporarily disturbed areas would be revegetated with native species

6. Habitat for three federally threatened species exists within the proposed project area. Potential effects to Greenback Cutthroat trout downstream of the construction site will be mitigated by placement of filtration barriers, as appropriate. Bald eagle nests have not been observed in the vicinity of the construction project; effects to eagles using the area will be mitigated by limiting the construction zone to previously disturbed areas. Rocky Mountain National Park is considered lynx habitat. No lynx have been observed in Hidden Valley; potential effects to habitat will be mitigated by limiting construction activities to previously disturbed areas.

   Habitat for five sensitive (rare) species exists within the proposed project area. Potential effects to moonwort habitat would be mitigated by avoiding known populations specifically, and spruce/fir forests in general. American Peregrine falcons have been observed in the Hidden Valley area, but no nests have been observed. Effects to peregrine falcons would be mitigated by limiting the construction zone to previously disturbed areas. Although wolverines have not been observed in Hidden Valley, old growth spruce/fir forests are considered habitat. Potential effects to wolverine habitat would be mitigated by avoiding impacts to spruce/fir forests. Northern goshawks have also been observed in the Hidden Valley area, but no nest sites have been reported. Potential effects to goshawk habitat would be mitigated by limiting the construction zone to previously disturbed areas. Boreal owl habitat consists of spruce/fir forest, a vegetation type common to the Hidden Valley area. No

nest sites are known to exist in the area. Potential effects to boreal owl habitat would be mitigated by limiting the construction zone to previously disturbed areas.

7. All construction activities would be conducted in compliance with Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment requirements for construction-related fugitive dust. Dust abatement measures, such as watering unpaved and disturbed areas, would be implemented as needed. Disturbed areas would be revegetated as soon as possible after construction to anchor the soil, and reduce dust and particulate matter in the air.

8. Short-term effects of construction to the natural soundscape would be mitigated through limiting the duration of construction activities. Long-tem effects would be limited only by the carrying capacity of the developed facilities.

9. Visitors and employees seeking an informal, less developed recreational experience could use the proposed facilities as a staging area to access undeveloped areas to the north and southwest of the proposed project area.

10. The proposed structure has been designed to blend with the surrounding environment. Vegetation may be used to screen the new structure. Any slopes that are created during construction would be contoured to blend with the surrounding topography and vegetation. Trail work would be completed with the least possible disturbance to native vegetation. Restoration and revegetation of disturbed areas would be the principal methods for mitigating construction-related disturbances to the landscape.

Reference may be made to the *Environmental Assessment of the Hidden Valley Improvement Project*, dated August 2002. Comments received during the public review period did not result in factual changes to the Environmental Assessment.

Alternative 2 and the provisions stated above minimize environmental impacts to RMNP. No other alternative met all of the objectives stated in Chapter 1 of the Environmental Assessment of the Hidden Valley Improvement Project. This alternative, with the provisions stated above, results in negligible to moderate impacts. This alternative received significant public support (80% of the respondents supported this alternative).

Concerns identified during scoping, and evaluated in the EA include impacts to soils, topography and geology, water resources, vegetation, wetlands, wildlife resources, endangered, threatened and sensitive (rare) species, air quality, natural soundscape, visitor and employee use and experience, visual resources, and local and regional economy. After careful review, it has been determined that constructing a new visitor contact and comfort station, new parking lot, and trails and picnic sites will not result in significant environmental impacts to Rocky Mountain National Park. These impacts would not impair park resources or values.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE (ALTERNATIVE 2)

The environmentally preferred alternative is the same as the preferred alternative (Alternative 2). This alternative meets the environmental policy goals as follows:

- *Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations*

Achieved	Not Achieved
- Directs appropriate use of the newly restored Hidden Valley area through interpretive panels and trails - Construction of facilities to direct appropriate use of the area (restrooms, picnic sites)	- Temporary disturbance of the natural environment during construction - Long-term impact from the presence of a building, picnic sites, interpretive trail, sledding hill, parking lot, and people

- *Assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings*

Achieved	Not Achieved
- Construction of restrooms, parking, picnic sites, interpretive panels, and trails will provide park visitors with a desirable recreational experience while protecting natural resources from over- and inappropriate use - Visitor safety while using the sledding hill will be enhanced by construction of earth berms designed to physically guide users to appropriate snow play areas/runs - The Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer has concurred with the park that implementation of the preferred alternative will have no affect on cultural resources in the park	- Some park visitors may consider the built environment (a building, parking lot, picnic sites, interpretive panels and trails) aesthetically undesirable

- *Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences*

Achieved	Not Achieved
- The preferred alternative achieves a beneficial use of the environment without significant degradation or impairment of natural resources - The preferred alternative will provide enhanced safety to park visitors using the sledding hill	- With the implementation of the identified mitigation strategies, there will be negligible to moderate impacts to natural resources

• *Preserve important historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choices*

Achieved	Not Achieved
- The preferred alternative would have no impact on historic, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage - construction planned under the preferred alternative would allow a diverse range of park visitors a variety of recreational opportunities at Hidden Valley	- The preferred alternative will not allow visitors to experience the developed portion of Hidden Valley area as a back country or "wilderness" experience. - Negligible to moderate impacts to the natural environment will be incurred under the preferred alternative due to construction of visitor facilities

• *Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and wide sharing of life's amenities.*

Achieved	Not Achieved
- Formal visitor access to the Hidden Valley area will be retained - Adequate facilities (restroom, picnic sites, trails) will enable visitors to enjoy the park during all seasons	- Visitors seeking a solitary park experience at Hidden Valley may think that a balance between population and resource use has not been achieved

• *Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.*

Achieved	Not Achieved
- Construction material salvaged from the former ski lodge will be used to construct the new visitor contact and comfort station - The quality of renewable natural resources will be enhanced through directed appropriate use via established restrooms, trails, and picnic sites	- The preferred alternative will result in a minor loss of depletable resources during construction.

Of all the alternatives considered, the Preferred Alternative best meets the national environmental policy goals while achieving the goals of this proposal, which are to:

1. Provide for visitor safety and enjoyment
2. Protect park natural resources

Alternative 2 best met the proposed project objectives as well as the criteria for selecting the Environmentally Preferred Alternative. The impacts to park resources described in Alternative 2 are considered to be negligible to moderate.

The No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) discussed below would result in varying degrees of impacts on park resources and park visitors.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN THE ENVRINMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Alternative 1 – No Action (No Improvements)

This alternative would recognize restoration efforts currently underway, but provide no public access to the Hidden Valley area. Under the on-going restoration projects, the Hidden Valley area will be completely restored to its original state; this natural state will be facilitated, but may not be fully recognized for 150+ years. The No Action Alternative would not provide any parking, restroom, picnic, or trail facilities in the Hidden Valley area, and would not fully achieve the goals of the proposal. This alternative also failed to fully meet the provisions of the environmental policy goals. There was no public support for this alternative.

WHY THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance requires consideration of both context and intensity.

(a) *Context.* The significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant.

Neither the Preferred Alternative or the No Action Alternative would have significant effects under any contexts – society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interest, or the specific locality.

(b) *Intensity.* This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following should be considered in evaluating intensity:

(1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse*

The Preferred Alternative provides recreational opportunities for park visitors, while protecting park resources for future generations. This alternative provides for continued recreational access to the Hidden Valley area. Both beneficial and adverse impacts would be negligible to moderate. No significant adverse effects to natural, cultural or socioeconomic resources were identified for the preferred alternative. Impacts of the No Action Alternative are also negligible to moderate, and are described in the EA.

(2) *Degree of effect on public health or safety*

The Preferred Alternative improves visitor safety at the snow play area by constructing earth berms to direct sledders away from natural and manmade obstacles. By providing restroom facilities, the park hopes to eliminate pollution in the form of human waste. Proposed improvements will result in a minor beneficial impact to the human environment. Under the No Action alternative there would be no developed visitor

access to the Hidden Valley area. If informal access continued, lack of restroom facilities could result in minor adverse impacts to the environment.

(3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas*

As described in the EA, no significant effects to natural or cultural resources were identified for the Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative will benefit park visitors by providing recreational opportunities and educational information on wetland restoration efforts. The proposed project area is near an on-going wetland restoration project. Development of visitor services has been planned to complement this restoration effort by interpreting the restoration project specifically, and park resources in general. There are no wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas that will be adversely affected from implementing the preferred alternative. The fact that this action will occur within a national park does not, in this circumstance, elevate insignificant impacts to a level of significance requiring a more detailed environmental impact statement.

(4) *Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial*

This EA generated local interest from private citizens and one organized group. On August 22, 2002, the EA was released for public review. The EA was available for public review and comment for thirty (30) days, which provided an opportunity for public input on the alternatives. Rocky Mountain National Park received ten (10) responses in the form of letters and e-mail. Of the ten respondents, five supported the preferred alternative, three supported the Preferred Alternative with minor suggestions, and two did not support any alternative, but made suggestions regarding development in the Hidden Valley Area. National Park Service responses to substantive comments are included in Attachment A.

The EA concludes that there are no highly controversial effects on the quality of the human environment. The EA adequately discloses the environmental consequences of both the Preferred Alternative and the No Action Alternative. The Preferred Alternative provides the best balance among all interested parties.

(5) *Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks*

As described in the EA and in this FONSI, the Preferred Alternative does not have any significant adverse effects on park resources. No highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks were identified in the EA or in the public comments.

(6) *Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration*

Implementing the Preferred Alternative will maintain visitor access to a popular recreation site in Rocky Mountain National Park. Improved facilities would enhance the visitor experience and protect park resources. This FONSI will not set a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about any future consideration.

(7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts*

Implementing the Preferred Alternative will have a negligible to moderate indirect and cumulative impact on natural resources in the park. 2.4 previously disturbed acres that may have been restored to habitable condition for wildlife has been used to provide facilities and recreation opportunities for park visitors. The Preferred Alternative will have a minor cumulative beneficial impact on visitor use in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Any potential cumulative impacts to the park are not considered significant. No other cumulative impacts have been identified in the EA or from the public comments.

(8) *Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

Alternative 3 will have no affect to properties on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. There is no potential to destroy significant scientific, cultural or historical resources from implementation of the preferred alternative.

(9) *Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.*

Hidden Valley contains suitable habitat for three federally listed species. These species include lynx, bald eagle, and Greenback Cutthroat trout. None of these species are known to inhabit the Hidden Valley area. Minor short-term adverse effects to habitat may be encountered during construction. Consequently there would be a range of no negative adverse effect to minor short-term adverse effects on threatened or endangered species. Long-term minor impacts may result from the presence of humans in the Hidden Valley area.

(10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, state, or local environmental protection law.*

This action violates no federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

Impairment

In addition to reviewing the list of significance criteria, the NPS has determined that implementation of the preferred alternative will not constitute an impairment to RMNP resources. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in *The Environmental Assessment of the Hidden Valley Improvement Project,* the public comments received, relevant scientific studies, and the professional judgement of the decision-maker guided by NPS *Management Policies* (2001). Construction activities will be confined to previously disturbed areas in Hidden Valley. There may be temporary impacts to topography, geology and soils; water resources; vegetation; wetlands; wildlife resources; air quality; natural soundscape; and visual resources. Long-term impacts on these resources will be negligible to moderate. The Preferred Alternative will protect and enhance the experience of park visitors. Overall, the implementation of the Preferred Alternative will result in minor to moderate long-term benefits to park resources and visitor experiences, and opportunities for their enjoyment with no impairment.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A Value Analysis meeting was held at RMNP on August 29, 2001. The purpose of this meeting was to review project goals and to develop alternatives. Stakeholders present at the meeting inlcuded:

Gary Buffington, Director of Larimer County Parks and Open Lands
David Thomas, Executive Director of the Estes Park Chamber Resort Association
Ken Czarnowski, Estes Valley Recreation District and RMNP
Mike Williams, Project Manager, NPS Intermountain Region Support Office
Chris Jones, Architect, NPS Intermountain Region Support Office
Randy Jones, Former Superintendent, RMNP
Tony Schetzsle, Assistant Superintendent, RMNP
Ben Hawkins, Chief of Facilities Management, RMNP
Larry Gamble, Chief of Planning and Compliance, RMNP
Larry Frederick, Chief of Interpretation, RMNP
Joe Evans, Chief Ranger, RMNP
Gregg Yarrow, Administrative Officer, RMNP
Joe Arnold, Engineer, RMNP
Kim Slinginger, Buildings and Utilities Supervisor, RMNP
Kyle Patterson, Public Information Officer, RMNP
Jana Chalk, Safety and Occupational Health Specialist, RMNP
Karl Cordova, Biologist, RMNP
Carol Cross, Draftsperson, RMNP
Keith Payne, Landscape Architect, RMNP
Lisa Hanson, Archeologist, RMNP

RMNP prepared *The Environmental Assessment of the Hidden Valley Improvement Project*, and released this EA for public review and comment on August 22, 2002. The EA was mailed to approximately 100 individuals and organizations; it was also available on the Internet on the park's website. The comment period closed on September 27, 2002. A Preferred Alternative and a No Action Alternative were analyzed in the EA.

RMNP received ten (10) letters via surface mail and e-mail. Eight of the responses supported the preferred alternative; three of these included suggestions for improving the Preferred Alternative. Two of the responses included implied support of the Preferred Alternative in that the suggestions for the Hidden Valley area were predicated on improvements included in the Preferred Alternative. All comments warranting an NPS response are addressed in Attachment A. No comments expressed by the public and agencies resulted in changes to the text of the environmental assessment.

The FONSI and the response to public comments will be sent to everyone who commented on the EA. The environmental assessment along with the FONSI will be posted on the park's Internet website (http://www.nps.gov/romo/).

CONCLUSION

The preferred alternative does not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The preferred alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Negative environmental impacts that could occur are negligible to moderate. There are no unmitigated adverse impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, known cumulative effects or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

The preferred alternative (Alternative 2) will be implemented in the spring of 2003.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an EIS is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

Recommended: Vaughn Baker — Superintendent — 2-3-03 — Date

Approved: Karen P. Wade — Intermountain Regional Director — 2-05-03 — Date

ATTACHEMENT A
Response to Public Comments
On the
Hidden Valley Improvement Project,
Rocky Mountain National Park

Comments received during the 30-day public comment period were focused on greater enhancement of visitor experiences at Hidden Valley.

Public Comments:

1. *The planned accessible trail should provide greater access to Hidden Valley Creek.*
   - *Wider bridges that would provide viewing and fishing opportunities*
   - *A ramp down to the water for direct access to the creek*

   The planned pedestrian bridges across Hidden Valley Creek are designed to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) codes (minimum width of five feet). Additionally, the park will construct an accessible access point to Hidden Valley Creek. This access point could accommodate fishing and viewing as well as a variety of other recreational opportunities. The unpaved portions of the planned trails are considered backcountry areas, and may exceed the ADA Architectural Guidelines for grade. However, these unpaved trails will meet Outdoor Recreation Standards for Accessibility.

   The park has determined that there is no safe way to provide wheelchair access directly to Hidden Valley Creek in the current project area.

2. *The leach field should prevent leachate infiltration into the stream and wetlands.*

   The planned leach field is designed to meet engineering requirements and standards set by Larimer County Department of Health and Environment.

3. *The "Schematic Plans for Proposed Development at Hidden Valley under the Preferred Alternative" (page 16 of the EA) does not show a shuttle bus stop. Designing the bus stop now would prevent impacts on new landscaping materials in the future.*

   Accommodations for a shuttle bus stop are included in the final design plan. No shelter will be built initially, but can easily be added if shuttle bus service to the Hidden Valley area is established.

4. *An exclosure should be constructed on some part of Hidden Valley Creek. This exclosure could provide habitat as well as serve educational efforts.*

   The suggestion that the park construct an exclosure on some part of Hidden Valley Creek will be considered in the Elk and Vegetation Management Environmental Impact Statement currently being prepared by the park.

5. *Please allow winter tent or snow cave camping, one site each for winter use only at the tops of the old Aspen and Columbine runs.*

   Rocky Mountain National Park currently allows overnight winter use in 'winter backcountry camp areas', identified in the *Backcountry/Wilderness Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* for Rocky Mountain National Park (2001:2-32, 2-33). The park permits roughly 50% more use per night in the winter than in the summer. Therefore, winter permits are rarely exhausted for overnight camping in the park. According to the *Backcountry/Wilderness Management Plan and Environmental Assessment,* Appendix C, Table 1, Camp Area Summary (2001:C-1, C-2), 32 areas on the east side of the park, and 23 areas on the west side of the park are available for winter camping. East side areas can accommodate 136 parties, and up to 1,632 people, while west side areas can accommodate 71 parties and up to 852 people.

   A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the *Backcountry/Wilderness Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* for Rocky Mountain National Park was signed in July of 2001. This plan is intended to guide wilderness and backcountry use in the park for a period of no less than five years, and no more than ten years. This plan was available for public comment prior to preparation of the FONSI; 38 comments were received, and responses/changes to the plan were prepared accordingly. At this time, the park anticipates adhering to the approved *Backcountry/Wilderness Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* (2001).

6. *Will 122 parking spaces be adequate?*

   The proposed parking lot was designed to accommodate peak winter use and carrying capacity of the sledding hill. Additionally, the park has allowed a 50% buffer to accommodate future increases in visitor use at Hidden Valley. Based on these figures, a 122- car parking lot will accommodate the majority of visitor use at Hidden Valley.

   The sledding hill should have the following:
   - *Steps or a path to the top to direct foot traffic off of the sledding hill (safety)*
   - *Posted sledding rules (safety)*
   - *Fires for sledders to warm up by*
   - *Places to sit at the top of the sledding hill*

   The suggestions to post sledding rules and create a designated uphill travel way have been brought up in a safety context. The park will address these concerns by posting a safety message on the interpretive panels in the breezeway of the new building. The park does not wish to place signs that may become obstacles in the sledding area.

   The park considered the opportunity to place a small shelter with a fireplace near the sledding hill for visitor use. This idea was rejected because of the potential for vandalism and possibly illegal camping. The new visitor contact and comfort station will be staffed most weekends during the sledding season, thus allowing visitor use of this facility.

   The Hidden Valley winter use area provides less formal visitor opportunities than a developed recreational site. Therefore, the park will not provide seating at the top of the

sledding hill. Any seating that might be envisioned for the top of the sledding hill could become an obstacle for sledders, skiers, and snowboarders who utilize the upper portion of the hill.

7. *Please have designated "women" and "men" restrooms rather than unisex facilities.*

   Final designs allow for separate restrooms for men and women. The women's restroom will have five stalls, while the men's restroom will have one stall and two urinals.